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ABSTRACT

The study examined the teaching concerns of university teaching assistants (TAs) and attempted to identify changes in the ways in which TAs think about teaching as they become more experienced. The study surveyed 145 first-time TA appointees at the University of California, Santa Barbara, and 79 more experienced TAs from a wide variety of the university's departments. After a few background questions, the survey then presented F.R. Fuller's open-ended question from the Teaching concerns Statement (Fuller & Case, 1972; Fuller, Parsons & Watkins, 1974) encouraging expression of concerns about teaching. Nine categories of concerns were identified and grouped into three categories: (1) survival stage/adequacy concerns (e.g., what is expected of me?); (2) mastery stage/student learning concerns (e.g., How do I deal with student attitudes?); and (3) impact stage/improvement concerns (e.g., How can I foster critical thinking and learning for its own sake?). The study found stage one concerns to be dominant, not only for the first-time TAs, but also for the experienced TA group whose adequacy concerns were focused more on the system and the teaching situation. Only for TAs with 10 or more quarters of TA experience did stage two concerns begin to outnumber stage one concerns; for all TAs there was a notable lack of stage three concerns. Results suggest the need for further development and training of experienced TAs. (DB)

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Changes in Teaching Assistant Concerns Over Time*

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Historically, the training and development of graduate student teaching assistants (TAs) have been predominantly focused on orientation activities designed to prepare TAs for their first classroom experiences or with semester long seminars on teaching that take place during the TAs' first year of TAing. After the first year, few universities offer TA development activities. While it is hoped that faculty continue to mentor TAs in the ways of teaching in their particular discipline, it is probable that the majority of TAs get most of what they learn about teaching through on-the-job training via the reactions and performances of their students.

As a result of this concentration of training during the first year, the university may be inadvertently conveying to TAs that teaching skills are easily and quickly learned in a few months. Thus, many TAs may come to believe that after initial survival in the classroom and a bit of polishing here and there, they know pretty much all there is to know about teaching. Those who TA long enough, may realize that there are many levels of teaching ability that one develops as more and more teaching experience is gained.

Background

Teaching, like any complex skill, is a developmental process. The procurement and enhancement of professional skills and perspectives can be viewed as a form of adult development with predictable stages of growth (Sprinthall and Thies-Sprinthall, 1983; Witherell and Erickson, 1978). Research using developmental stages as a construct, whether it be in the area of cognition, personal growth, or moral development, has usually assumed that stages are hierarchical, one stage must be completed before going on to the next, each stage involves more complexity, and thought is structured differently at each stage.

Numerous developmental models regarding the professional growth of pre-college teachers and student-teachers have consistently identified three to four stages of development (Burden, 1982; Fuller, Parsons, & Watkins, 1974; Katz, 1972; Leland, 1984). These hierarchical, yet cyclical, stages can be described as follows: stage one involves survival as teacher and authority; stage two involves development of and mastery of teaching skills; stage three focuses on discovering and meeting student learning needs; and stage four concerns are about educational issues and the assumptions behind those issues.

The first stage is termed a survival stage, in that, beginning teachers tend to be concerned with issues of self-adequacy, classroom management, being liked by students, and evaluations

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* This paper has been revised and the data reworked as per comments by conference respondent Marilla Svinicki. Tables and some results are different from those presented at the conference.

HE 023 178

made of them by their supervisors (Fuller & Brown, 1975). Teachers at this beginning stage are usually concerned about their knowledge of subject matter and tend to use a subject-centered approach. They are usually lacking in confidence, unwilling to try new methods, and tend to conform to a preconceived image of teaching (Burden, 1982). Leadership is a central issue in that the teacher strives to establish him/herself as a legitimate authority (Leland, 1985).

In the second stage, instructors have gained in confidence and their concerns turn to planning and organization, curriculum, teaching methods, and their students as people as well as students (Burden, 1982). This stage has been called the mastery stage (Fuller & Brown, 1975). There tends to be a focus on competent instructional leadership (Leland, 1985).

Third stage concerns tend to emphasize the social and emotional needs of students, curriculum issues, and the quality and types of learning materials (Fuller & Brown, 1975). Teachers become more student-centered and are more willing to try new teaching methods. Professional insights grow and preconceived images of teaching are abandoned (Burden, 1982). Leadership tends to be facilitative (Leland, 1985).

In some of the developmental models, there is a fourth stage in which instructors are concerned with questions about the nature of learning and the function of schools within society (Katz, 1972). The focus is on student as complete learner and leadership style may be one of "healer" or counselor (Leland, 1985).

Some researchers suggest that teachers reach maturity (stages three and four) within approximately five years (Katz, 1972; Burden, 1982) while others note that maturity may never be reached regardless of the number of years spent teaching or that all stages repeat themselves depending on the nature of the teaching situation as well as the level of professional development attained by the instructor (Fuller, 1970). Through extensive interviews, Pataniczek (1978) found that veteran teachers experience aspects of each stage throughout their teaching careers; although earliest stages may be largely resolved, aspects of earlier stages can be re-experienced by teachers who predominantly function at the mature stage. The anxieties of teaching a new course or a new group of students may bring back some survival level concerns, albeit briefly.

For the most part, research on developmental stages in teaching has been carried out with elementary and secondary teachers. One theoretical work, which was is based on post-secondary teaching, uses developmental theory and postulates four stages of teaching. At each stage, the model describes the teacher's schema of teaching, schema of learning, and actions in teaching. In this model, the definition of teaching moves through four stages: teaching as telling, teaching as directing students to proper materials, teaching as transmitting knowledge

and influencing learning, and finally, teaching is viewed as a complex interaction in which both student and teacher influence learning (Sherman et al., 1987).

Another developmental model for post-secondary teaching was based on open-ended faculty interviews at a large state university (Freedman et al., 1979). This study identified changes in the way faculty perceive and define their teaching role and found that faculty moved from conventional or traditional views held by their reference group, to more differentiated view of teaching, and eventually to a more personally constructed, self-definition of their faculty role. Perspectives on teaching, learning, and students were found to shift as faculty gained more experience in teaching and developed their own definitions of the teaching role.

Much of the research on faculty in higher education has centered around changes in career focus and career development stages that correspond to age-dependent life stages, and not on teacher development per se. In an attempt to study faculty development in terms of changes in their perceptions about teaching, the study reported here undertook to examine the experience of what might be considered the pre-entry level position for faculty: the position of graduate student teaching assistant. It is a group about which there is a lack of empirical research (Abbott, Wulff, & Szego, 1989).

Specifically, the present study sought to replicate Francis Fuller's (1969, Fuller & Brown, 1975; Fuller & Case, 1972) research, which led to one of the most frequently cited teacher development models in the literature. Fuller's model was based on her inquiry into the specific types of teaching concerns held by elementary and secondary student teachers and how those concerns changed throughout their practice teaching. The current study sought to investigate the teaching concerns of TAs, to identify changes in they ways in which TAs think about teaching as they become more experienced teachers, and to determine whether such changes are developmental in nature.

Data Collection

To examine possible changes in the teaching concerns of teaching assistants over time, 145 first-time TA appointees at the University of California, Santa Barbara were surveyed during the fall quarter, two days before classes began. To obtain a sample of TAs with varying amounts of TAing experience, the same survey was sent to 100 TAs in selected departments during winter quarter, 79 of whom completed the survey. While this group included some TAs who were surveyed fall quarter, the surveys were anonymous and unfortunately, it was not possible to identify the surveys of TAs who were in both data collection groups. TAs in both groups were from diverse academic departments and the amount of orientation to teaching and TA training varied widely among departments.

The survey asked a few background questions: the TA's department, length of TAing experience, and experiences in non-university teaching. The survey then presented Fuller's open-ended question from the Teaching Concerns Statement (Fuller and Case, 1972; Fuller, F.R., Parsons, J.S., & Watkins, J.E., 1974): "When you think about your teaching, what are your concerns?" TAs responded with as many concern statements as there was room for on a single sheet of paper.

Demographics

For both data collection groups, approximately 80% of TAs were between 20 and 30 years of age, and respondents were fairly evenly distributed in terms of gender and academic discipline areas: humanities, social sciences, physical sciences, and engineering—with the exception that there were no engineering TAs in the second data collection group.

Of the newly appointed TAs, over one-fourth (26%) had teaching experience other than tutoring or TAing while over one-third (35%) of the experienced TA group had had such classroom teaching experience (see Table 1) . Nearly one-fourth of the experienced TA group had been TAing for over two years (see Table 2). Hence, the over all sample consisted of TAs with varying amounts and kinds of teaching experience.

TABLE 1 PRIOR TEACHING EXPERIENCE

	New TAs	Experienced TAs
a. no classroom exp. or tutoring	41 (28%)	------
b. tutoring	40 (27.5%)	26 (31%)
c. previous TAing experience	27 (19%)	(see Table 2)
d. previous high school or elem. exp.	16 (11%)	6 (7%)
e. college lecturer experience	8 (5.5%	7 (8%)
f. other**	13 (9%)	17 (20%)

**Note: "other" category included such experience as preacher, community college teacher, lecturer to business groups, peace corps and teacher's aide.

TABLE 2 TAING EXPERIENCE OF EXPERIENCED TA GROUP

Quarters Taught	Number of TAs
1-3	34 (41%)
4-7	29 (35%)
7-9	10 (12%)
10-15	10 (12%)

Data Analysis

In coding TA responses, Fuller's (1972) concern categories were initially followed as closely as possible: changes in wording of category examples helped make them more appropriate to the post-secondary setting. Two major difficulties persisted with this method; the first was that TA concerns did not fit well into Fuller's predefined categories and the second was low inter-rater reliability (80% agreement).

As to the latter problem, six raters had been selected: three undergraduates and three experienced TAs. The initial thinking was that this diversity of raters added to the validity of the ratings. Each rater was asked to classify the written TA statements into one of the modified Fuller categories. However, there were some consistent discrepancies between ratings of the two groups of raters. For example, undergraduates tended to rate grading concerns in the non-teaching concerns code while TAs rated them as teaching concerns. Additionally, there was no agreement among raters as to the number of concerns written by each TA. Often TAs would write a paragraph in response to the survey question. Undergraduates would identify more separate concerns in these paragraphs than the experienced TA raters.

Two actions were taken to resolve these problems. First, it was decided that undergraduates would not be used as raters since it appeared that their definition of teaching was limited to what the teacher does in front of the class. The initial ratings were discarded and three new raters were hired, all of whom were experienced TAs. Second, to stabilize the number of concerns each rater coded for each survey response, the researcher and an assistant identified the number and content of each concern on all completed surveys. While this procedure resulted in some arbitrary decisions about where one concern ended and another began, rules for the determinations provided consistency and stabilized the number of concerns reported by raters. Yet, even with these changes, inter-rater reliability remained a problem.

In an attempt to design a short training program for raters that would set guidelines and rules for deciding among category codes, myself and two TAs began carefully going over the survey responses. We renamed, redefined, and added to Fuller's categories in order to make them more appropriate to our data. While we set out to develop a way to train raters, what actually happened was that we, ourselves, became the raters.

It was clear to us was that while we could get general agreement among ourselves by continually discussing and readjusting the categories, it would be time consuming and perhaps impossible to train a group of raters since even in our small working group we had to occasionally use a majority rule method to decide the category in which to place a TA concern. We concluded that areas where we were not readily in agreement resulted from the fact that the concerns themselves were stated in ambiguous ways and it was a matter of interpretation as to what the TAs actually meant by their statements. The simplicity of the instrument had

resulted in brief responses that were open to interpretation as to the major focus of the concern. For example, "Am I waking up their minds?" could be categorized as a self-presentation concern or a concern for student learning. Using Fuller's coding rules, we determined the code level of such ambiguous concerns by viewing them within the context of the other concerns written by that particular TA. For all cases where a clear decision between two categories could not be made by a majority of the three raters, the concern was scored in the higher category.

Results

For the 224 TAs surveyed, there was a total of 517 concerns: with an average of two concerns per TA for each data collection group. Nine categories of concerns were identified. Each was carefully and extensively defined and exemplified (see appendix). These categories were then grouped into three stages similar to those identified by Fuller (see Table 3).

TABLE 3

TA CONCERNS: DEVELOPMENTAL STAGES & CATEGORIES***

New TAs	Exp. TAs	CONCERN STAGES AND CATEGORIES
1 (.5%)	4 (2%)	0. Non-teaching concerns
		STAGE 1 - SURVIVAL STAGE / ADEQUACY CONCERNS
45 (13%)		1. What is expected of me? (new TAs)
237 (68%)	57 (33%)	2. How adequate am I as a teacher, leader, person? (new and experienced)
0	55 (32%)	3. How adequate is the system?
282 (81%)	102 (65%)	TOTAL FOR STAGE 1
		STAGE 2 - MASTERY STAGE/STUDENT LEARNING CONCERNS
46 (13%)	30 (17%)	4. Are students understanding? How well are they learning?
7 (2%)	13 (7%)	5. How do I deal with student attitudes?
53 (15%)	42 (24%)	TOTAL FOR STAGE 2
		STAGE 3 - IMPACT STAGE/IMPROVEMENT CONCERNS
10 (3%)	9 (5%)	6. How can my teaching better help students learn/understand?
2 (.5%)	3 (2%)	7. How can I foster critical thinking and learning for its own sake?
0	1 (1%)	8. Having evaluated my own teaching, how can I improve?
0	2 (1%)	9. Improving Student Education
12(3.5%)	15 (9%)	TOTAL FOR STAGE 3

*** It should be noted that when this study was originally presented at the Second National Conference on the Employment and Training of Teaching Assistants, category three was named "Why doesn't the system work better?" and was included in stage two as per Francis Fuller's (Fuller & Brown; 1975) definition of stage two. However, after conference critiquing and reexamination of this category, it was placed in stage one and renamed as an adequacy concern. Its placement in stage two obscured the meaning of that stage as being centered on student learning. Its current placement in stage one is more appropriate to the more teacher-centered concerns of the survival stage.

Categories in stage one, termed by Fuller (Fuller & Brown; 1975) as the survival stage, consisted of TA concerns regarding adequacy. New TAs were concerned about adequacy of self as teacher, leader, and in some cases, as a person in an authority role. More experienced TAs were concerned not only about their own adequacy but about the adequacy of the system and the teaching situation in general (for further detail see Appendix). For both groups, the greatest number of concerns were stage one concerns; 81% of new TA concerns and 65% of experienced TA concerns were categorized in stage one (see Table 3).

Stage two involves concerns about student learning and making classes interesting and relevant to students. For both groups of TAs the second greatest number of concerns were of this type; 15% of new TA concerns and 24% of experienced TA concerns (see Table 3).

Regardless of amount of TAing experience, few TAs mentioned third stage concerns. Statements that expressed this stage had to do with ways of varying instruction to impact students, a desire to foster critical thinking, a concern about helping students to develop as people, and a search for useful ways of improving teaching and learning. Only 3.5% of new TA concerns and 9% of experienced TA concerns were of the stage three classification (see Table 3).

Factors such as amount and type of prior teaching experience were examined to determine whether or not they were related to the concern stages. No relationships were found. Regardless of the type of prior teaching experience reported by both new and experienced TAs, the greatest percentage of concerns were of the stage one type (see tables 4 and 5). Although the group of new TAs with college lecturer backgrounds had a greater percentage of stage two and stage three concerns than other new TAs (see Table 4), this finding did not hold true for experienced TAs with lecture experience (see Table 5).

TABLE 4 CONCERNS OF NEW TAS GROUPED BY PRIOR EXPERIENCE OF TAS AND STAGE

	no teaching or tutoring	tutoring	prior TAing	HS/Elem	Lecturer	Other
Stage 1	83 (92%)	85 (80%)	52 (78%)	29 (78%)	6 (43%)	27 (82%)
Stage 2	6 (7%)	16 (15%)	15 (22%)	6 (16%)	5 (36%)	5 (15%)
Stage 3	1 (1%)	5 (5%)	0	2 (6%)	3 (21%)	1 (3%)

TABLE 5 CONCERNS OF EXPERIENCED TAS GROUPED BY PRIOR EXPERIENCE OF TAS AND STAGE

	no teaching or tutoring	tutoring	prior TAing	HS/Elem	Lecturer	Other
Stage 1	-------	35 (65%)	51 (71%)	13 (76%)	4 (80%)	9 (41%)
Stage 2	-------	16 (30%)	16 (22%)	1 (6%)	1 (20%)	8 (36%)
Stage 3	-------	3 (6%)	5 (7%)	3 (18%)	0	5 (23%)

The number and percentage of stage one concerns remained high even for TAs with as many as seven to nine quarters of TAing experience (see Table 6). Only TAs with ten to 15 quarters of experience were found to have more concerns at stage two than at stage one.

TABLE 6

CONCERNS OF EXPERIENCED TAS
GROUPED BY AMOUNT OF TAING EXPERIENCE AND STAGE

	1-3 quarters	4-6 quarters	7-9 quarters	10-15 quarters
Stage 1	**50 (68%)**	**41 (70%)**	**15 (68%)**	6 (37%)
Stage 2	18 (24%)	15 (25%)	3 (14%)	**7 (44%)**
Stage 3	6 (8%)	3 (5%)	4 (18%)	3 (19%)

As a whole, TAs in this study were found to have expressed a perponderance of stage one concerns (81% for new TAs and 65% for experienced TAs), a few stage two concerns (15% for new TAs and 24% for experienced TAs), and very few stage three concerns (3.5% for new TAs and 9% for experienced TAs).

Summary, Conclusions, and Implications

Newly appointed and experienced TAs with varying kinds of prior teaching experience and varying amounts of TAing experience were surveyed about to their teaching concerns. Using existing models of teacher development stages as a base, nine categories of TA concerns were identified from survey responses and grouped into three stages. Concerns in this study differed from those of existing models in that the latter reflect concerns of pre-college teachers. The concern categories of the current study reflect the institutional structures, role definitions, and teaching issues found in the post-secondary setting for graduate student TAs.

As would be expected, survey results indicated that first-time TAs were most occupied with survival level concerns: adequacy of self as instructor, leader, and as a person in a new role. Even TAs who had been college lecturers reported cares and worries that were predominantly stage one concerns.

What was unexpected was the finding that stage one concerns were also dominant for the experienced TA group, regardless of their prior teaching experience. However, their survival concerns did differ from new TAs surveyed in that experienced TAs had adequacy concerns regarding the system and the teaching situation (see Appendix, category three) whereas new TAs were concerned with their own adequacy as TAs.

Another unexpected finding was that only for TAs with ten or more quarters of TAing experience did stage two concerns begin to slightly outnumber stage one concerns. Stage two in this

study refers to concerns about student learning, how well students are understanding the material, and, generally, how well they are benefiting from the instruction given by the TA. At this stage, TAs are also concerned about the quality of students as learners, their attitudes about learning, and their academic preparation or lack of it. Some of the concerns of this stage reflect the TA struggle in dealing with negative student behaviors or attitudes and the TA desire to find more ways to facilitate student learning. Given the low percentages of stage two concerns in this study, these student-centered types of concerns appear to be fairly sophisticated and tend to be of secondary concern to the more self-centered and teaching-centered concerns of stage one.

For all TAs in this study, there was a noticeable lack of stage three concerns. Stage three reflects a view of students as individual learners with a variety of learning needs, a concern for students learning not only the course material at hand but also learning to value the subject matter and to understand the underlying thinking processes of the discipline. At this level, TAs also indicate a desire to learn about and experiment with various teaching methods and indicate a tendency to reflect on how and what students are being taught. This is indeed a sophisticated perspective on teaching and one which a large number of TAs may not be aware of—let alone attain.

The researcher can only speculate as to the reason(s) for these findings. The survey question, due to its simplicity, may have failed to elicit stage two and stage three concerns held by TAs. This study was meant as a preliminary one and certainly further investigation is needed. On the other hand, it may be that the nature of the teaching assistant position tends to encourage TAs to be concerned about presentational and other survival level types of teaching concerns and does not encourage more sophisticated concerns. The TA, as an assistant, is not responsible for the design or content of the course and rarely has any input into the construction of the syllabus, design of course assignments, or other instructional decisions. Hence, TAs may not become involved with the greater complexities of the teaching-learning process that would involve the more student-centered and thought provoking concerns of stages two and three. If this speculation is accurate, and assuming this study is generalizable, more campuswide and departmental TA training activities need to be expanded from the focus on first-year TAs and begin to include more programs and monies for the further development and training of experienced TAs. Programs could focus on the complex aspects involved in promoting student learning, constructing syllabi, addressing student diversity, developing course materials, considering variations in instructional design, and examining the richness of classroom interaction. This kind of experience would seem to be crucial if one of the functions of the graduate student TA role is to prepare TAs as the future professoriate.

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APPENDIX

DESCRIPTION OF CONCERN CATEGORIES

CATEGORY 0 NON TEACHING CONCERNS

A) Concerns not about teaching.
   1. I don't get paid enough.
   2. Why am I always broke?

B) Concerns that involve teaching but are not about teaching
   1. The money I receive as a TA is crucial so naturally I try to do my best.
   2. What concerns me is whether or not I'll ever be able to get a job teaching.

CATEGORY 1 (STAGE 1) Where do I stand? What is expected of me?
The focus is on procedures, policy, evaluation, and relationship with authorities.

A) university expectations of TAs
   1. How many hours a week am I supposed to work, do I keep attendance records?
   2. Which course will I be TAing?

B) professor expectations of TAs
   1. What is the philosophy of the professor?
   2. Will I have to attend lectures for the course?

C) relationship with professors
   1. What kind of relationship will I have with the professor?
   2. Will the professor give me an hones opinion of my teaching?

D) evaluation of TA by students, professors and others
   1. How will my performance be evaluated?
   2. Who will evaluate my teaching? What happens if I get a bad evaluation?

E) degree to which TA has authority / types of and definition of TA responsibilities
   1. Can I deviate from the planned material?
   2. Will I have authority to give grades and will they be accepted?

F) procedural issues on grading, administration, handling cheating, and generally doing a "good job"
   1. I want to be sure to grade fairly even on essay tests.
   2. What should I do if someone is cheating on an exam?

G) time management (balancing TA and graduate student responsibilities)

H) confusion, lack of support, and need for ego reinforcement

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CATEGORY 2 (STAGE 1) How adequate am I as a teacher, leader, person?

Concerns about adequacy as a teacher focus on TA performance, authority issues, leadership style. and the basic interaction between TA and student both as teacher and student and as person to person.

A) adequacy as a teacher

A-1) basic teaching skills:

1. Will I know how to handle unforeseen situations (e.g. how do you teach when half the class is late or doesn't do the reading etc.)?
2. Do I really know my subject matter?
3. Will I be able to answer their questions?
4. Will I be able to cover the subject matter in the time allotted?
5. What should be introduced and what should receive more time?
6. I'm worried about stage fright, nervousness, & forgetting what I want to say.
7. I'm worried about how I come across and about the kind of image I project.
8. I'm worried I won't be able to get discussion going or be a good discussion leader.
9. I'm concerned about being adequately prepared for TAing the class.

A-2) basic presentation skills:

1. Are my English language skills good enough to communicate well?
2. I speak rapidly and tend to mumble.
3. I will have to learn to write on the chalkboard.
4. I'm concerned about presenting information clearly and in an organized way.
5. I want to make class enjoyable,fun, & present material in an engaging way.

B) adequacy as a leader

1. My main concern is the problem of keeping order in class.
2. I feel it's imperative that students respect me and my authority.
3. What will students likely do to "try me out?"
4. Will I be able to motivate them?
5. I'm concerned about student confidence in me as a teacher.
6. I want an atmosphere that is friendly but still serious enough for them to learn.

C) adequacy as a person

C-1) basic teacher-student relationship

1. I want to build rapport with students.
2. Will students like me and respect me?
3. I know a little about them & can share their experiences/sympathize w/them.

C-2) person to person relationship

1. How can I get to know them?
2. Will students accept me as a friend?
3. I have a difficult time dealing with students who have problems.

C-3) self as person

1. I am concerned about whether I'll be able to be patient enough with students.

CATEGORY 3 (STAGE 1) Why doesn't the system work better?

A) University Policies and Procedures

1. The low admission standards of the university result in poor quality students in class.
2. I am alarmed by the lack of consistency in TA load from department to department.
3. We need labor-saving computer management programs for exams etc. Much time would be cut from administrative duties and there would be more time for instruction.
4. The quarter system is too short.
5. I'm not getting enough pay given the amount of work I'm required to do.
6. I didn't come to the university to teach. I don't like it.

B) Concerns Regarding Departmental Policies and Procedures

1. A quarter time TA is really a half time TA in terms of amount of work expected.
2. There are too many inequities; some course require more time to teach than others.
3. We aren't told until a day or two before the quarter what course we're going to TA.
4. I'm concerned about my ability to TA a course that I have never taken before. I don't think TAs should be given courses for which they are underprepared to teach.
5. Teaching is interfering with my finishing my degree but the department requires it.
6. The department is unsupportive and demands too much.
7. I dislike the 50% A-B and 50% C-D-F grading policy of the department.

C) Concerns About Faculty

1. Large general classes run rampant with cheating and manipulation. The professor the course must establish guidelines for cheating, late papers etc.
2. Lectures and text material is too complex for students. The TA is left with filling in the blanks and unraveling the confusion students have from the professor's lectures.
3. There needs to be standardization for TA sections.
4. There is little or no faculty guidance.
5. The department should do more to stop unethical TA behavior.
6. Labs and lectures should be better coordinated.

D) Classroom Concerns/ Time Allocation

1. I am concerned that we have so little time to discuss so much information.
2. With the increasing workload, there's not enough time to grade papers properly.
3. There's too many students to run an adequate discussion section.
4. The room is too small for the number of students
5. I have a hard time coming up with reasons why students receive lower grades than they think they deserve.
6. The overall subjectivity of the grading concerns me.

E) Training Concerns

1. We need more hands-on learning of how to teach labs by someone who knows how.
2. It would be helpful if we were given guidelines on how to write and grade exams.

F) General Concerns

1. I want to do a good job so that I'll get the TAship again next year.

CATEGORY 4 (STAGE 2) Are students understanding? How well are they learning?

The focus is on student learning rather than on teacher presentation. Evaluation is seen as a means of measuring student comprehension not simply as grading or grading fairly. Student enthusiasm is viewed as facilitating learning in the course, not as an end in itself.

A) student learning
1. Right now my chief concern is are students getting it?
2. The question still arises in my mind as to how well I've challenged my students.
3. I want them not only to understand what is said, but also to be able to apply what is said.
4. I want to be sure they understand the fundamentals.

B) teaching methods that facilitate learning
1. I want to make the subject alive and meaningful to students so they'll remember it.
2. I want to find the means of presenting the material in such a manner that most of the students can grasp it easily.
3. I want to keep up their interest/enthusiasm so they can see a need for learning this material and perform better as a result.
4. By making my examples relevant to student lives, they will be better able to understand the material.
5. I want to make students feel comfortable in the classroom and at the university.
6. How can I get students actively involved? How can I motivate them?
7. I'm concerned with creating an atmosphere conducive to learning.
8. Are students benefiting from my section? Do they value it?

CATEGORY 5 (STAGE 2) How do I deal with student needs?

A) TA perceptions of student qualities
1. I'm concerned with students not doing the work.
2. I'm concerned with having to spoon feed students.
3. I'm concerned with lack of student preparation, poor ability, and inadequate background for the subject matter.
4. I want students to take responsibility for themselves.
5. Getting students to participate is difficult. They rather be passive bystanders.
6. I hate teaching apathetic students.
7. Students don't take discussion sections seriously.
8. Students expect higher grades than they deserve.

B) Dealing with difficult student qualities
1. How can I encourage more student participation?
2. Most students just want to pass the test but I also try to get them to think about how & why of the class material.
3. I try to substitute for the lack of basic knowledge that I see in many students.
4. I'm concerned about the dilemma: student's interest in getting the facts down and my interest in getting them to understand to to think.

CATEGORY 6 (STAGE 3) How can my teaching better help students learn/understand?
The focus is on teaching to varying groups of students and to individual student differences. A focus is also on whether students appreciate and value the material.

A) individual and group differences
1. How can I teach to the different levels of student abilities and levels?
2. I want to treat students as individuals and draw them out in discussion
3. I'm concerned with the many individual differences and how to approach them.
4. Most of all, listening to students. they have great ideas if we give them the chance.

B) enthusiasm for the subject material for its own sake
1. I want to make the material relevant to student lives so they 'll see its importance.
2. I want students to see how what they're learning fits into the overall picture of the discipline and value the subject matter.

C) increasing student skills
1. I want students to be able to use their learning beyond the classroom.
2. I want to help students motivate themselves.

CATEGORY 7 (STAGE 3) How Can I foster critical thinking and learning for its own sake?
The emphasis is on thinking skills rather than subject matter and on teaching to individual student learning needs rather than to groups of students. Student enthusiasm about learning is seen as an end in itself not just a means to learning course material.

A) fostering critical thinking
1. My concerns are about educating the student as a whole so that each student may become a thinking individual. By this I mean that the student needs to learn not only form books but also from many other resources.
2. I am concerned about the fact that may students never learn to be independent seekers—they soak in what teachers feed them, but they never go on to any independent study.
3. How do I lead students into critical inquiry without suggesting the professor's views are wrong or that their own views are inadequate?

B) valuing learning for its own sake
1. I want them to realize why they are learning what they are and to enjoy it because it's valuable.

CATEGORY 8 (STAGE 3) Having evaluated my own teaching, how can I improve?

The focus is on one's own professional development, ethics, philosophical issues, examining underlying assumptions, and examining events outside the classroom that influence student development.

A) professional development
1. I don't like my tendency to take words out of students' mouths & finish their sentences.
2. I'm concerned with finding a better grading system.

B) ethics and examining underlying assumptions
1. Can the curriculum I present be viewed as being racist or sexist in anyway?
2. I'm concerned about requiring text books that are overpriced by publishers.

C) quality material
1. I'm concerned that the material I present is up-to-date.
2. I'm concerned that I present the material in a non-bias way so students can make up their own minds and think critically.

D) curriculum issues
1. I think the department is not concerned enough about offering these courses in a timely fashion so that students can finish their degrees in the normative time.
2. It seems to me that the sequencing of the courses is problematic for student learning.

E) philosophical issues
1. I think the medium is the message and that the use of editing groups to teach writing is an important concept that teaching students about the writing process itself.
2. I question whether I'm right in excluding people from the CIA as course speakers.

CATEGORY 9 (STAGE 3) Improving Student Education

These concerns are highly abstract and question the basic assumptions of teaching in general, teaching in the subject area, or the very subject matter itself.

1. I'm concerned as to whether or not discussion sections, in general, are actually useful to students.
2. I'm concerned that undergraduates may not be getting sufficiently strong grasp of important subjects which are needed to be productive citizens in a high tech world.